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ABSTRACT

Practices intended to promote equity, reproduce inequity. Theories based on belief in individualism concentrate attention on individual differences, removing social differentiations. Being concerned with the formation of common culture, art educators present aesthetic objects as culturally neutral, devoid of the context from which they were produced, thus presenting the illusion that a hierarchy of aesthetic quality exists that is fixed and agreed upon. (MM)

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Dilemmas of Equity in Art Education: Ideologies of Individualism and Cultural Capital

Kerry Freedman

An examination of art education discourse illustrates that fundamental assumptions of equity are contained within what we consider common sense decisions about curriculum. Represented in the selection and arrangement of knowledge for schooling are beliefs about the rights and desires of people and their 'lot' in life. Reform in art education has generally been considered a just response to existing social tensions concerning who should have access to what knowledge and who is to adopt which values. However, conflicting educational practices have emerged from beliefs about social justice. Practices initiated to promote equity have reproduced social inequalities.

The assumptions of equity and conflicts of practice have historically been hidden in an enabling discourse of reform concerning at least two arrangements of art education. First, curriculum has been organized around ideologies of individualism which presume that children should prepare for productive, well-adjusted lives by making art in school. To focus upon individual production gives the appearance of addressing and solving problems of equity; as will be discussed, however, the stress on individualism has obscured forms of socialization which maintain an acceptance of social differentiation.

Second, curriculum has focused upon the development of a common culture. Looking at and talking about certain works of art has been to develop an appreciation for the 'great accomplishments of man'. The focus in public schooling, which emerged near the turn of the century, has been to raise moral and aesthetic standards and promote social mobility by providing an education in elite cultural knowledge for common people.

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However, what has been considered equitable for the general public has promoted the interests of particular groups. Social tensions in the assumptions about individualism and a common culture give focus to the example of art education as a representation of the complex and profound issues of equity bound within curriculum.

The Production of Art and the Individual

Curriculum is designed in relation to theories of childhood, intelligence and competence. The theories are not neutral. They maintain certain beliefs about the relation of individuals to society which have emerged through a particular cultural history. In the United States, there has been a focus on 'the individual' as the manifestation of human rights and possibilities. The theoretical conceptions of childhood, intelligence and competence have been defined and applied in relation to this notion of individualism.

Art curriculum has been shaped by individualism through national agendas and common beliefs about what is just in at least three ways. First, mandatory public school art was originally to provide people of low social and economic status with marketable skills. Second, certain people have been thought special or innately gifted. There has been a search for talent in children so that inborn potential could be nurtured for superior achievement and leadership, regardless of social position at birth. Third, there has been a desire to have children express an inner quality of 'self' to therapeutically overcome socially imposed pathologies. The production of art has been thought to enable independence and self-realization.

These conceptions of individualism, while representing variations in practice, maintain certain common assumptions. The focus on individuals is believed to resolve larger problems of class, race and gender. It concentrates attention on individual differences, removing social differentiation from scrutiny, and placing responsibility on particular people rather than social structures. It carries the assumption, for example, that individuals are good or bad citizens who develop personal qualities in isolation from the social body they live within.

Historically, the instrumental character of individualism as a framework for art education contains certain political and economic premises which pose problems for equitable practice. The individualism has taken forms which have fulfilled industrial purposes, promoted only certain types of merit and defined what constitutes mentally healthy expression. To understand these issues of equity, the emergence of art

education as a curriculum of technical skill development will be considered first. Then, implications of ideas about innate artistic ability and conceptions of self-expression in school will be discussed.

Responsible Individuals and the Development of Technical Skills

Art education in the nineteenth century reflected a general belief that character development improved the life of individuals. Art was to discipline the mind through a technical training which focused upon the perfection of drawing and design skills. With practice and the force of will, students were to develop skills which would equitably promote success through work and moral discipline.

Vocational training as social reproduction

A historical discussion of equity in art education must include at least two provincial nineteenth century roots. The first is the private art lessons in drawing and needlework which were to prepare the daughters of the affluent for marriage. The girls were trained as wives and mothers to provide beauty and refinement for their family. Girls designed and stitched floral patterns that would decorate objects for the home. The art education was enobling as well as functional. It was to provide a moral education for those believed to be the keepers of high aspirations and standards of morality (Efland, 1985; Freedman, 1987 a).

By the turn of the century, public girls schools had adopted and elaborated the private program to include training for labor outside the home. The public schools were for less affluent girls than those who had private lessons and were not thought to need vocational skills. The principal of the Washington Irving High School in New York stated,

> The school is an institution that attempts to provide for the young women residing in the lower part of Manhattan Island, every kind of educational and vocational training that experience and investigation suggest as a proper public service. Every one of the two thousand girls in the school must receive training in drawing as an essential feature in the education of a cultivated woman. (Quoted in Carter, 1908, p. 205)

A second root of art education was a common school drawing training to prepare lower class and immigrant boys for industrial work (Freedman, 1987 a; Freedman and Popkewitz, 1988). Before 1870,

American industrialists hired designers trained in Europe. In 1870, leading Massachusetts industrialists obtained a state industrial drawing requirement for common school students. The drawing education was to supply industry with qualified designers, while at the same time providing common school children with marketable skills.

As well as a technical training, the drawing program was a moral education. It was modeled after the industrial work place and was to effectively instill in students certain work habits and values which were sought by corporate management. Design skills were taught as separate from the finished product (as was production in the factories) and developed by meticulously copying simple adult drawings. Through the copying, students were to learn discipline, uniformity, efficiency and other values considered vital to work, home and society, but assumed deficient in poor and immigrant children.

These early forms of art education illustrate dilemmas in the conceptions of equity in public schooling. To prepare girls to become good wives and mothers may not appear to be unjust, but the education reproduced narrowly defined class and gender roles. The mandatory public school training in a technical skill may not seem unfair, but it assumed a division of labor in which particular people were destined to do certain types of work.

There was a strain in education between the role of social reproduction and national ideals of social mobility. To raise one's status was believed a question of having competitive skills and the character to do well. Social mobility for women was through the development of homemaking skills which would enable them to make a good marriage. For male workers, competition in the marketplace was thought to reward those who were deserving. Individuals who took responsibility and displayed diligence would have a fair chance to do well.

To promote social mobility was also to establish structures in which mobility would occur, thus introducing forms of control. Early art education, while apparently providing for the social mobility of individuals, reproduced existing social relations by providing students with only certain types of knowledge. The assumptions of mobility contained a hierarchical structure of forms of labor for different social groups.

A shift in rhetoric from social reproduction to social mobility

Near the turn of the century, overt discussions of social differentiation became muted as a new conception of equity and labor training through

schooling emerged (Spring, 1986). There was concern about the unfair treatment of certain social groups and a belief that equitable schooling should be something more than skilled labor training for the poor. The free market became thought of as inefficient and was no longer trusted to reward those most deserving. An emphasis was placed on testing and measurement to produce a more equitable education that selected public school students for particular forms of work (Kliebard, 1986; Krug, 1969).

The change in discourse was tied to new middle class interests which had become prevalent in the schools. Despite egalitarian rhetoric, middle class parents and professionals directed curriculum and instruction toward economic success (Katz, 1987). Most valued was a public school that would prepare middle class students for a higher education. A liberal and specialized training was expected to efficiently and fairly facilitate social mobility.

In this context, a new form of art training developed in the schools. A demand for separate specialized technical drawing courses and manual training for those who would not attend high school remained, but a general art education was created that broadened to include handicrafts and other activities not previously taught in school as vocational skills (Haney, 1908). The children who were considered future managers were to benefit from industrial drawing activities by developing manual dexterity and visual acuity. All public school students were to develop a love of beauty and refinement through drawing the fanciful images and arabesques previously typical of girls' training. The art education was to have practical value for all children and improve the quality of labor and production.

> Indeed, there is not a teacher, a silversmith, a printer, a milliner, a dress-maker, a machinist, a plumber, a paper-hanger, a builder, an engineer, a saleswoman, an embroiderer, a shipping clerk, an electrician, a real estate salesman, a contractor, that would not find value in increasing his potency in his vocation. (*Mississippi Elementary School Curriculum*, 1926, p. 54, quoted in Kern, 1985)

The focus upon the development of art skills as helpful to the vocations of public school students was prevalent through the 1930s and 1940s and has remained a part of curriculum. In contemporary secondary schools where art is an elective, students who are unsuccessful in school and not expected to attend college, are placed into commercial art and industrial design courses.[1] This emphasis in curriculum has produced contradictions in its implications for equity. Technical training, while considered equitable because it promotes the development of marketable skills, also reproduces social stratification.

The Inborn State of Individuals: Equity and the Notion of Talent

Near the turn of the century, education was influenced by particular perspectives on the possibilities of human nature. What was understood as natural in children was shaped by theories of intelligence, eugenics and the interests of a growing middle class. The new definitions of children's performance capabilities had subtle but important implications for equity in schooling.

To understand the assumptions of inborn potential in art education, we must consider the prevalent beliefs about individual differences. The beliefs were framed by a science of biological selection. Social stratification was conceptualized as a result of variance in the intellectual possibilities of different races, classes and genders. Eugenics was concerned with racial improvement through hereditary selection. Eugenicists maintained and legitimated existing power arrangements through the selective use of empirical data and statistical analyses at least through 1920 (Gould, 1981).[2]

Vital to the eugenics movement was an interest in the study of hereditary genius. Eugenicists claimed that genius was passed on through the blood of Northern European men; women, Blacks and other 'races' who were immigrants and poor were not to be diagnosed with genius, except in relation to their own kind. Biographical reports of renowned historical men, especially artists, and their families were used to support the genetic theory (for example, Galton, 1869). There was an assumption that men of genius would be able to rise above a birth of low socioeconomic status and achieve success.

Although readers were given the impression that these studies were biological, the factors used to distinguish genius were social and cultural. The criteria for genius included an outstanding professional reputation which required a desire for prominence and, typically, an education available only to the affluent (Constable, 1905). The only professional group that consistently supported the theory that men could rise above a life of poverty to achieve notoriety were artists, who were thought to actually benefit from the hardships of being poor (Constable, 1905). Studies also linked genius to insanity which was thought to be accompanied by physical abnormalities and immorality. Greater genius meant greater mental and physical unsoundness (Lombroso, 1891; Nesbit, 1900).

The scientific study of human possibilities included a biological and psychological study of children. G. Stanley Hall, a leading proponent of child study, was an evolutionist (Curti, 1959). Hall thought that the natural 'needs' and potentials of children would be discovered through

scientific study and fulfilled, in part, through schooling. However, because he believed that the genetic differences of children would determine their outcomes in life, schooling could only be useful if it were individualized because institutional standardization would retard the natural growth of those born to be successful. For Hall, education was to help make the best reach their full hereditary potential; 'dull' children were not to be the primary concern of schooling. Social class, race and gender were thought the outward representation of genetically determined intellectual ceilings. Education was to provide the greatest opportunity for bright boys, who came from the middle class (Hall, 1907). According to Hall, girls were to be prepared for their greatest destiny: motherhood.

Child study was to identify the 'natural' elements of artistic development which were interpreted as measures of intelligence. It was assumed that all normal children drew objects and represented space in particular ways during certain times of growth. The growth of an average child was considered a matter of linear adjustment to certain adult standards of artistic skill. However, the artistic abilities of children were no longer to be conceptualized as technical skills learned through disciplined practice, but rather as stages through which children passed naturally.

The normative interpretation of children's art emerged as part of an ideology of failure and success in children. A child whose development seemed slow or stayed was assumed to have some genetic disfunction or racial inadequacy. Some children appeared to go through the stages faster or reach stages that others could not attain. In contrast to the belief that students excelled through hard work, which was integral to early common school practices, children were taught that some excelled because they had been born meritorious.

The positive deviations in student performance were considered illustrations of genius. However, the idea of genius in children was problematic. Galton's nineteenth-century notion required an age of fifty years (time enough to gain reputation) and was found in one in a million men. Children who were able to go beyond the definitions of normal development, in contrast, were relatively more common. While not all these children would become adult geniuses, all were to have special treatment in school.

By the first decades of the century, art education literature had shifted from discussions of genius to a new notion of talent in children; talent was believed hereditary, but different from genius and found most often among the middle class. A talented child was thought better than his peers, but unlike men of genius, not odd. Talented children were not believed to be insane or to have abnormalities that would reflect negatively upon

the family. On the contrary, children with talent maintained values promoted by the middle class in school. To be talented was to be morally good and well-adjusted. Talent meant individuality, psychological strength and an ability to lead.

In part, a search for talent in school emerged because the qualities of a talented child (exceptional skills, middle class values and leadership capabilities) were thought analogous to money. Talent was something you either had or you didn't; it was finite and could be wasted. Children diagnosed as talented would become financially successful if directed in a special way. To give certain children extra attention was considered equitable, not only because it allowed those born to be great to become so, but because it was an efficient means to improve society. Because a prosperous society was assumed to be made up of successful individuals, unnurtured talent became a public concern. Early in the century, state courses of study and federal reports (for example, Course of Study in Art, Idaho, 1915, quoted in Kern, 1985; Farnum, 1926) articulated a belief that the public had a responsibility to specially educate talented children.

Although the search for talent was originally left to the discretion of teachers, they were later considered inadequately trained for making these determinations fairly and efficiently (Farnum, 1926; Carroll, 1940; Hollingworth, 1942). The discrimination of talent was objectified and tested. It was assumed that appraisal through testing would reveal natural merit.

However, the discrimination of artistic talent was framed by culturally specific aesthetic norms. As mentioned above, in the early part of the century, talent in art was determined by the ability of a child to draw more lifelike pictures than some example of averaged behavior. Talent was defined by conformity to a certain aesthetic standard. While lifelike representation is still assumed to indicate artistic ability, characterizations of talent now include divergent thinking, which has emerged as part of an avant-garde aesthetic, a new set of middle class values and a reconceptualization of creativity since the cold war.

The conceptualization of talent in children gave a new focus to equity which still has currency in education. There is a rhetorical insistence upon each individual reaching their greatest potential which is conceived of as something within a person that is 'waiting' to be discovered. Potential is considered biological but is defined in cultural terms and by social possibilities. The 'inborn' state of an individual is bound by the conceptual horizons of scientists and educators. The definitions of talent, while appearing to enable and promote individual interests, have resulted from larger interests in society and have focused curriculum upon children's social and economic inequalities.

A curriculum was developed to make equal the chances of being unequal. It was to provide an efficient method of social mobility, but actually provided means to maintain wealth, status and power differentiation (Entwistle, 1978).

Special but Equal: A Focus on the Self

A third focus of individualism which has framed issues of equity is psychotherapy. Early in the century, the overtly moral quality of art education shifted toward an interest in providing children with a psychologically healthy upbringing. Educators began speaking of art as a means of therapeutic self-expression. Public school children were to have the opportunity for healthy personality development through school art activities.

The therapeutic curriculum emerged with a general redefinition of public affairs as psychological relationships. What had previously been understood as the ethics of behavior was transformed by a discourse of mental fitness. The character, or will of individuals to gain reputation, became conceptualized as traits of personality (Susman, 1984).

The therapeutic production of art was central to progressive private schools during the first decades of the century, and shortly after, gained currency in the public schools. A premise of this perspective was that children were naturally healthy and society was pathological. The process of making art was conceived of as a remedy for the illness imposed on children by society. Curriculum was the organization of activities to provide an avenue for children's free self-expression which was stifled in the world outside school (or outside of art class). Art education was to keep children childlike rather than to prepare them for adult life.

By the 1940s and 1950s, school art was to therapeutically maintain a democratic personality considered vital in a world thought to devisively impose unhealthy, undemocratic principles on weak individuals (Freedman, 1987 b). During and after the Second World War, political tendencies were described as personality traits and mental states (for example, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford, 1950). There was a concern that fascism was a result of and propagated an authoritarian personality. Educators addressed the possibility that children could develop authoritarian tendencies as a result of certain schooling techniques. An equitable curriculum was one that promoted self-expression and awakened an assumed dormant independence in each child (Lowenfeld, 1949).

The assumptions of equity in the therapeutic art contained conflicting

dynamics. A primary purpose was narcissistic. It focused upon developing in children confidence in their own actions; they were to consider their own thoughts and beliefs superior while respecting the differences of others as equal to their own. At the same time, children were not to have differences. All children were to display the same personality traits in their art. A particular artistic style was thought to represent the self-expression of children. For example, certain qualities of line and uses of color were assumed to indicate a healthy personality (for example, Lowenfeld, 1949). Children's art was not to be evaluated qualitatively. It was either not expressive (if it did not have the appropriate stylistic characteristics) or, it was expressive and relative in quality.

A curriculum to develop a democratic personality represents a current conflict of equity in schooling. To talk of expression through art gives the illusion of a politically neutral health maintenance, but the notion of expression involves certain social impositions which may not be equitable. While the focus of curriculum is the individual, the manner of expression is defined by experts. It has been argued that, while promoting narcissism, education has produced individuals that are easily socially controlled by instilling faith in certain white, middle class values through a professional expertise of psychology (Lasch, 1979). While curriculum has been designed to make children believe that each is special and important, the students are to respect the authority of professionals who determine what is important within them through a psychology developed in relation to 'normal' behavior and shaped by a particular political milieu.

To summarize, assumptions of what is just are contained in curriculum. Ideologies of individualism involve an assumption that equity is achieved through developing skills, talent or personality which are cast in various forms of responsibility, heredity, and socially induced pathology. However, 'the individual' has been like a mythical hero. It has not represented particular people in real situations. Rather, it has been a socially constructed ideal which has reflected dominant cultural and political beliefs and been applied by experts in ways that appear equitable but maintain the interests of particular social groups.

Ownership, Appreciation and an Equitable Distribution of Culture

Art education, at one level, is believed inherently elite because it draws upon traditions of Western European fine art. Curriculum has involved looking at and talking about masterpieces that represent a lofty and

seemingly noble form of culture. A stated purpose of art education has been to make high culture accessible to all through the study of fine art objects.

The conceptions of fine art and high culture are tied to the values and economic status of a dominant social group. Historically, fine art has been included in the definition of the life of a cultivated person with refined sensibilities and a high socioeconomic status. For centuries, the wealthy have both given financial support to the fine art community, and been influential in determining its content and management. The history of fine art has also been a history of gender power arrangements (Nochlin, 1971; Parker and Pollock, 1981). Although an appreciation of fine art has been included in the definition of a refined lady, male artistic production, interpretation and analysis has promoted ideological representations of womanhood and denied quality in women's art.

When art became a subject of public schooling in the late 1800s, private philanthropy controlled the distribution of European high culture to the American population. New wealthy industrialists had become the benefactors of art through purchases made during visits to Europe. Collections were built on the recommendations of art historians who functioned as investment counselors. The philanthropists made their private collections available to the public through the building and financing of museums.

The philanthropic patronage was to develop and support institutions which would make immigrants and the less affluent more cultured, and therefore civilized. The culture of a few was presented as the best culture to produce enlightened citizens and promote a just and moral society. The concern about civility was tied to evolutionary theories and the emerging anthropological studies of 'primitive' societies and races. There was a belief in the civilized nature of those who had gained worldly success and supported American economic and cultural values. Fine art represented the highest form of human production in morality and skill. The development of cultivated taste by the public was to be an indication of national progress.

These noble aspirations coexisted with certain functional imperatives of schooling in relation to social, political and economic arrangements. School art was to equitably distribute cultural capital. While museums maintained and managed the private collections of philanthropic industrialists, they were not educational institutions and were not obligatory. Philanthropic foundations and museums provided schools with traveling shows of art objects and supplemented art education through the production of lantern slides and reproductions of masterpieces available through the development of new technologies. Art education

was to promote a respect for those who possessed high culture by focusing attention upon a certain conception of taste. What appeared to serve and enrich also legitimated existing social relations.

Art was distinguished from other forms of production. There was a notion of aesthetics that assumed an inherent value to certain works of art. It represented the object as separate from the context in which it was produced. Certain works of art were thought to have this inherent quality which made them universally appreciated throughout time. To be educated in art meant to be able to appreciate this inherent quality.

A tension exists between the exclusiveness of fine art appreciation and ownership and an equitable distribution of cultural knowledge in American society. Early in the century, developing a common appreciation of high culture through schooling was considered an equitable and democratic education. The tension remains in the categories of high culture and education which are maintained by new social, political and economic agendas.

Recently, as part of the general educational reform movement, there has been a renewed call for a curriculum which focuses upon the study of particular fine art objects and values. A perspective of the reform maintains the belief that an appropriate aesthetic experience is based on an appreciation of certain master works of art which have an inherent, timeless and universal value agreed upon by experts (Smith, 1986). The focus is upon the technical and formal qualities of art objects. An illusion is promoted that there is professional consensus about the value of a work of art and that history will appropriately filter out the less than great. The focus on excellence in curriculum does not make clear that there is continual debate even on those objects the general public are told are masterpieces. It is not made apparent that art rejected in its time has often later been revered, or art valued in its time, is later rejected.

The social purposes and contexts of the art are not considered in this notion of excellence. When considered at all, the work of other cultures is critiqued, not in relation to the context in which it was produced, but in relation to the values represented by the curriculum. From this perspective, children should not encounter contemporary art or art of newer media because they do not have a professionally agreed upon standard of excellence; they have not been 'tested' over time.

The curriculum, which is to give public school children access to high culture, is not necessarily equitable. Rather than improving the quality of social life, the perspective tends to reproduce that by which particular groups maintain power through school processes (Bourdieu, 1984). It does not consider the cultural diversities of art or that appropriate tastes and sensitivities may be found outside this conception of excellence.

The notion of excellence maintains the interests and beliefs of certain social groups as reality for all.

Conclusions

A historical study of art education reveals a focus on the individual which contains assumptions of equity. The conceptions of individualism have been administered through the production of art. The individual has been defined as responsible for achieving his or her greatest potential through an education that enables, but the boundaries of potential have been determined by larger interests than those of the individuals to be served.

Art education has also been concerned with the formation of a common culture. The notion of culture has historically excluded certain groups in its understanding of social production, but assumed that all groups should be enculturated. The perspective has involved an appreciation of art above other forms of production, but trivialized artistic work by presenting it as if it were produced outside of social life. The culturally specific qualities of art, which are tied to the values and traditions of social, political and economic power arrangements, have been presented as universal and timeless. By representing aesthetic value as culturally neutral, curriculum has focused away from the socially constructed character of what is valued as culture. The conception of excellence in a perspective of the current reform denies the importance of the sociohistorical location of production, valuation and management. Assertions of superiority of a particular view of culture on the basis of a claim of expertise or noble values hides the social quality of art knowledge and presents the illusion that a hierarchy of knowledge is fixed and agreed upon.

Notes

1 These students are also counseled into art courses in relation to other conflicting beliefs concerning equity in school. At one level, it is assumed that students cannot fail to produce art if they participate in an art class. On another level, it is believed that if a student does fail an art course, it is unimportant. In this sense, art is considered innocuous; to keep unsuccessful students in such courses will not hurt them because they do not need to spend the time in college preparation courses. Further, making art is thought to be a therapeutic aid, particularly for students who have 'adjustment' problems. To keep these students in art studio classrooms is believed to help manage other courses that appear to require more discipline and attentiveness.

2 For a more thorough discussion of eugenics, see Steven Seldon's chapter in this volume which shows that these ideas, while rejected as legitimate by the

scientific community, remained in influential educational texts much after 1920.

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